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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4758
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEAHLA/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL
RHMFIUU/TSA HQ WASHINGTON DC
RHMCSUU/FAA NATIONAL HQ WASHINGTON DC
RHMCSUU/FAA MIAMI ARTCC MIAMI FL
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC

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SUBJECT: Guyana Finally Moves Towards Machine Readable Passports

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: After more than ten years of delays, Guyana will finally begin issuing machine-readable passports (MRPs) this summer. After having bid on the project eleven years ago, Canadian Bank Note (CBN) was awarded the contract in December 2006. The company says that they will be ready to begin issuing MRPs within six months although there are several issues still to be resolved with the GOG. Although CBN believes that the GOG will be minimally ready to begin issuing the MRPs in the near future, a senior company representative expressed frustration with his interaction with GOG. END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) A Senior Regional Director with CBN contacted the embassy to offer a briefing on the upcoming release of the Guyanese CBP. The representative told RSO and Consular Chief that he had been dealing with the GOG for eleven years, since CBN first placed their bid on the project. He stated that the company, which has handled MRP contracts in countries throughout Caricom, with the exception of the Bahamas and Barbados, had almost given up on the GOG ever deciding to award the MRP contract. Out of the blue, the GOG informed the company in December that they had won the bid. The GOG also made a sizeable down payment on the contract, larger, in fact, than the company anticipated and larger than some other countries in the region have made.

13. (SBU) While pleased to have been finally awarded the contract, CBN has experienced frustration in working with the GOG. When awarded the contract, CBN informed the GOG that they should immediately begin a press campaign to inform the public that the non-MRPs would be invalid as of December 28, 2009, to be ICAO compliant. With the large numbers of Guyanese living abroad, getting the word out that they will need to apply for new passports in the next two years will be a significant undertaking. To date, the GOG has made no plans to educate the public on the issue. CBN also reported that the GOG budget for MRP implementation and issuance was well below that of other CARICOM countries, which translates into less secure passports. The MRPs will have several security features, including the biodata and photo being printed on the first page of the passport rather than the inside cover, but will have a less secure laminate than some other CARICOM MRPs and no biometric features. Although CBN has discussed with the GOG the need to raise the cost of a passport to at least a cost-recovery level, the GOG remains firm in their belief that every individual has the right to a passport. (NOTE: A Guyanese passport currently costs US\$5. With such a low fee, Guyanese carry their passport as a form of identification. Post frequently sees applicants who have obtained new passports to cover up previous visa refusals, overstays in the US, name changes, and other information they do not want revealed. END NOTE)

14. (SBU) The Guyanese Immigration Office is the subject of frequent scandals and dismissals. Less than a year ago, the Director Immigration was transferred after 100 blank Guyanese passports went missing from the Immigration Office. CBN's contract with the GOG includes an extensive accountability feature, electronically tracking passport books and applications throughout processing. However, passport security is only as good as the civil documents used to confirm identity and every aspect of Guyana's civil registry and documents is exploited by Guyanese who are attempting to assume or conceal an identity. CBN stated that they had attempted to include a review and upgrade of the civil registry as part of the MRP package, but GOG was not interested. The current Immigration Office building is an old, wooden structure with inadequate air conditioning and electrical wiring. CBN has made upgrading the building a priority for the MRP installation but has gotten only minimal commitments from the GOG to do their share.

15. (SBU) Part of the MRP plan is to connect immigration at the international airport to integrated watchlists, including Interpol. (NOTE: Currently, immigration at the airport has only a paper watchlist, which is not kept at the immigration booths, and it, therefore, rarely checked. END NOTE) If controls are instituted to ensure that officials actually check the database, the watchlist will obviously aid Guyanese border security. CBN noted that one of the GOG's initial requests was that CBN install MRP scanners at special booths at the airport prior to CWC. While CBN complied, they noted that the scanners are for show only, since they do not connect to anything. CBN has offered to train the Consular Section on the MRP's security features once production is underway.

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